

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 6756

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: IN, PGOV, TECH, ENRG
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S DISCUSSION OF THE NUCLEAR RELATIONSHIP
WITH PRIME MINISTER DESAI

1. I MET WITH PRIME MINISTER DESAI AT HIS RESIDENCE THIS MORNING FOR 35 MINUTES IN COMPANY WITH V. SHANKAR AND J. MEHTA. A PURPOSE OF THE MEETING WAS TO REVIEW THE STATE OF PLAY ON THE NUCLEAR ISSUES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BROADER INDO-US RELATIONSHIP. THE PRIME MINISTER WAS WARM, ATTENTIVE, AND AS USUAL INCLINED TO SPEAK IN TERMS OF BROAD PRINCIPLES. HIS COMMITMENT TO FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH THE US REMAINS STRONG; HIS RESPECT FOR PRESIDENT CARTER, GREAT; AND HE EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT TOGETHER THEY COULD ASSURE THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WOULD TRANSCEND THE CURRENT DIFFERENCES ON THE NUCLEAR ISSUES AND THE ADVERSE PUBLIC OPINION WHICH HAS BEEN BUILDING UP HERE BECAUSE OF THEM.

2. OUR MEETING BEGAN BY MY CONVEYING MORE OR LESS THE INFORMATION AND IDEAS SUGGESTED BY THE DEPARTMENT. THE PM KNEW ALREADY OF THE EXECUTIVE ORDER; CONCURRED FULLY THAT THE DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED IN THIS SHIPMENT SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO GET IN THE WAY OF EFFORTS TO RESOLVE OUR DIFFERENCES ON NON-PROLIFERATION POLICY; AND RECOGNIZED WITH FAVOR, BUT NOT MUCH COMMENT, THE STEPS WE
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ARE TRYING TO TAKE IN SALT II AND THE CTB NEGOTIATIONS TO RESTRICT VERTICAL PROLIFERATION.

3. WHEN I RAISED THE SORTS OF QUESTIONS HE MIGHT EXPECT IN HIS VISITS TO CAPITOL HILL, ADDING TO THE LIST REPROCESSING OF THE SPENT FUEL AT TARAPUR, HE SPOKE STRONGLY AND AT SOME LENGTH ABOUT INDIA'S COMMITMENT TO ESCHEW NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVES AND TO DO

NOTHING THAT WOULD LEAD TO MISUSES OF NUCLEAR MATERIALS. WHEN I PRESSED FOR MORE SPECIFIC REPLIES ABOUT THE MAINTENANCE OF IAEA SAFEGUARDS AT TARAPUR AND FOREGOING THE REPROCESSING OF THE SPENT FUEL THERE, IF WE EVENTUALLY HAVE TO TERMINATE THE EXISTING SUPPLY AGREEMENT, HE INDICATED HE SAW NO REASON TO TRY TO DECIDE THOSE ISSUES NOW. HE SAID THAT HE HAD MADE CLEAR IN THE PARLIAMENT THAT HE DID NOT CONSIDER THE AGREEMENT TO HAVE BEEN BROKEN BY THE DELAYS IN OUR SHIPMENTS, AND HE ADDED THAT HE HAD TAKEN PAINS NOT TO BE CRITICAL OF OUR GOVERNMENT AND NOT TO SUGGEST THAT A UNILATERAL U.S. TERMINATION OF THE AGREEMENT IS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION. WHEN I SUGGESTED THAT REPROCESSING THE SPENT FUEL MIGHT NOT BE TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANTAGEOUS (DRAWING ON WHAT SETHNA HAS INDICATED TO COURTNEY), DESAI SAID, "THEN, WHY SHOULD I DO IT?" BASICALLY, HOWEVER, HIS CURRENT POSITION IS THAT HE SHOULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO NARROW HIS OPTIONS ON THESE QUESTIONS WHILE THE INDO-US AGREEMENT REMAINS IN FORCE AND ITS TERMINATION LESS THAN CERTAIN.

4. I INTERPRETED HIS REMARKS AS CONFIRMATION OF THE EMBASSY'S JUDGMENT (CONVEYED IN NEW DELHI 6714) THAT OFFICIAL LEVEL TALKS PRIOR TO JUNE 13 WOULD BE UNPRODUCTIVE, AND DID NOT SPECIFICALLY PUT THAT QUESTION TO HIM.

5. THE PRIME MINISTER AT A LATER POINT IN OUR CONVERSATION MADE AN OBSERVATION THAT I THINK FURTHER ILLUMINES HIS ATTITUDE. SPEAKING OF INDIA'S DESIRE TO HAVE GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL NATIONS, CONFIDENTIAL

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HE SAID THAT WHEN HE FIRST TALKED WITH BREZHNEV IN MOSCOW LAST YEAR, BREZHNEV KEPT SAYING, "IF YOU DO THIS, WE CAN DO THAT". DESAI SAID HE REPLIED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT DID NOT LOOK ON ITS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THAT WAY. IT HAS CERTAIN POSITIONS ON THE BASIS OF WHICH IT ACTS BECAUSE IT BELIEVES IT IS RIGHT TO DO SO. THESE INCLUDE A DETERMINATION TO BE FRIENDLY TO ALL NATIONS, NOT TO BUY THEIR FAVOR, BUT AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE.

(COMMENT: DESPITE THE LOFTINESS OF THIS VIEW, MOST OF THE PM'S PRINCIPAL ADVISERS ARE OF COURSE CONSIDERABLY MORE EARTHY. IF THEY CAN SEE SOME ADVANTAGE POSSIBLY ACCURING TO INDIA, THEY WILL REACH FOR IT SO LONG AS DOING SO DOES NOT ENTAIL AN APPEARANCE OF KNUCKLING UNDER.)

6. MUCH OF OUR CONVERSATION DEALT WITH THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON BROADER BILATERAL RELATIONS OF OUR DIFFERENCES ON THE NUCLEAR QUESTIONS, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE OF THE STARK HIGHLIGHTING THAT THE LATTER HAVE BEEN RECEIVING IN THE PRESS BECAUSE OF THE NRC'S DELAYS AND EVENTUAL VOTE. WE RECOGNIZED THAT THE TARAPUR SUPPLY AND THE SAFEGUARDS ISSUES HAVE BECOME DO LADENED WITH EMOTIONS, HAVE TAKEN ON SO MUCH SYMBOLIC CHARACTER, IN THE MINDS OF POLITICALLY AWARE INDIANS THAT THERE IS A DANGER THAT OUR WHOLE

RELATIONSHIP MAY FOUNDER ON THEM. WE ALSO AGREED THAT ON BOTH SIDES THE ROOM FOR MOVEMENT TOWARD A SUCCESSFUL FINAL ACCOMMODATION WAS NOW QUITE NARROW. THE U.S. IS CONSTRAINED BY THE NON-PROLIFERATION ACT OF 1978, AND INDIA, BY ITS DECLARED DETERMINATION NOT TO ACCEPT SAFEGUARDS UNLESS SOME VERY DIFFICULT, PERHAPS EVEN UNOBTAINABLE CONDITIONS ARE MET BY US.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 6756

EXDIS

I TOOK IT ON MYSELF TO URGE THAT THEREFORE, EVEN WHILE WE DO HOPE AND WORK FOR A RESOLUTION OF THE TWO PARTICULARLY CONTENTIONS ISSUES, THE PM SHOULD TAKE A LEAD IN TRYING TO PUT THEM IN A BROADER CONTEXT IN THE PUBLIC MIND HERE, SO THAT THESE TWO ISSUES WOULD BE LESS SEEN AS THE LINCHPINS OF THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. I FURTHER EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT A SIMILAR EFFORT UNDOUBTEDLY ALSO NEEDS TO BE MADE WITH RESPECT TO AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION, AND I SUGGESTED THE PM COULD DO SOME OF THIS TOO WHEN HE VISITS THE STATES. THROUGHOUT, BE IT SAID, THE PM WAS SOMEWHAT MORE SANGUINE ABOUT THESE CONCERNS THAN EITHER JAGAT MEHTA, OR SHANKAR, OR I AM. AT ONE POINT HE DISMISSED HIS AND OUR CRITICS AS "COMMUNISTS". HE SAID THAT HIS STATEMENTS IN PARLIAMENT AND TO THE PRESS WERE ALL DESIGNED TO SUPPORT THE BROAD AND FRIENDLY RELATIONS HE WANTS INDIA TO HAVE WITH US. HE SEEMED DISINCLINED TO DO MORE TO INFLUENCE OPINION IN THIS COUNTRY; ON THE OTHER HAND, HE SAID HE WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING WITH ELEMENTS OF THE U.S. PRESS IN NEW YORK AND WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS IN WASHINGTON. HE IS CONVINCED THAT HE CAN PERSUADE THEM TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT INDIA'S POSITION.

7. COMMENT: AS MUST BE APPARENT, I THINK THE PM IS OVERLY SANGUINE ON THE MATTERS MENTIONED IN THE PREVIOUS PARAGRAPH. IF WE ATTACH GENUINE IMPORTANCE TO THE AREAS OF COMMON INTEREST

OUTLINED IN THE DELHI DECLARATION-- AND PARTICULARLY TO BEING ABLE
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TO WORK WITH A COLLABORATIVE INDIA ON NORTH-SOUTH AND OTHER DEEP
AND PRESSING INTERNATIONAL ISSUES, SUCH AS THOSE OF SOUTHERN
AFRICA-- I THINK THAT IT IS HIGHLY IMPORTANT THAT LEADING FIGURES
IN BOTH COUNTRIES TRY TO DO MORE TO PLAY UP THE COMMON INTERESTS
AND TO MAKE CLEAR THAT GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES
SHOULD NOT HINGE ON PERFECT AGREEMENT IN THE NUCLEAR FIELD.

8. IN MY VIEW, THE OVERALL OBJECTIVES OF THE PM AND THE PRESIDENT
ON THE NUCLEAR FRONT ARE THE SAME--NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND
REDUCING THE DANGER OF NUCLEAR ARSENALS. THEIR DIFFERENCES AS
TO THE CHOICE OF MEANS TO THAT END ARE ONES ON WHICH HONEST,
SINCERE, AND EVEN WISE MEN MAY DIFFER. OPTIMALLY, SUCH MEN
MAY DIFFER ON THE CHOICE OF MEANS, IF NOT OF ENDS, WITHOUT EITHER
FEELING RANCOR OR CAUSING OTHERS TO INDULGE IN IT. THOSE, I
SUGGEST, ARE THE ATTITUDES THAT WE NEED TO BE CULTIVATING AND
PROMULGATING BOTH AGAINST THE PROBABILITY THAT U.S. SUPPLY FOR
TARAPUR AND INDIA'S ACCEPTANCE OF SAFEGUARDS WILL CONTINUE TO BE
THE SORT OF PUBLIC SORE-POINTS THAT THEY HAVE COME TO BE, AND
FOR THE FURTHER EVENT THAT WE MAY BE UNABLE TO ACHIEVE
A SATISFACTORY RESOLUTION OF THESE ISSUES WITHIN THE TIME AVAILA-
BLE.

9. I TRUST IT WILL BE UNDERSTOOD THAT I AM NOT CONTESTING
THE PRESIDENT'S NON-PROLIFERATION POLICY. INDEED, I SUPPORT IT AND
AM ALMOST DAILY ENGAGED IN TRYING TO GAIN IT BETTER UNDERSTANDING
AND APPRECIATION HERE. I AM SIMPLY TRYING TO BE REALISTIC ABOUT
THE DIFFICULTIES IT FACES HERE, AND AM URGING THAT INDO-U.S.
RELATIONS SHOULD BE PROTECTED, SO FAR AS POSSIBLE, FROM A POSSIBLE
SHIPWRECK ON THESE DIFFICULTIES. END COMMENT
GOHEEN

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